

Essential Questions as described by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe

"At the heart of all uncoverage, then, is the deliberate interrogation of the content to be learned, as opposed to just the teaching and learning of material."

Jay McTighe and Grant Wiggins 1999

Understanding By Design Handbook



Characteristics of Essential Questions

- ❖ Essential Questions have no one obvious right answer.
They uncover, rather than cover up a subject's controversies, puzzles and perspectives.
e.g. **What is snow?**
Why is winter colder than summer?
- ❖ Essential Questions raise other important questions, often across subject-area boundaries
e.g. **How does global warming affect all forms of life?**
What can be done to decrease CO₂ emissions?
- ❖ Essential Questions address the philosophical or conceptual foundations of a discipline.
They focus the learning of big ideas and core processes in Science.
e.g. **In nature do only the strong survive?**
- ❖ Essential Questions recur naturally and are important enough to show up in several science units.
e.g. **What evidence of Patterns of Change is illustrated within...(the Rock Cycle, Seasons, Adaptation)?**
What is the relationship of Form to Function in...
(Plants, Animals, Cell Shape, States of Matter)?
- ❖ Essential Questions are framed to provoke and sustain student interest.
e.g. **Why/how do we see color?**
- ❖ Essential Questions provide a continuum of learning from broad overarching questions to more specific Unit Questions.

Guidelines:

- Questions should be framed for maximal simplicity.**
- Questions should be worded in student -friendly language.**
- Questions should provoke discussion.**
- Questions should lead to larger essential and unit ideas.**